

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the effects of the proposed project on neighborhood character. According to the 2014 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is an amalgam of the many factors that combine to give an area its distinctive personality. These elements may include a neighborhood's land use; socioeconomic conditions, open space, shadows, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, transportation, and noise. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the proposed project would result in a new building, the Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation (the Gilder Center), in an approximately 105-foot-tall (five stories above grade; taking into account mechanical and elevator bulkheads, a portion of the rooftop would reach 115 feet) addition to the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH or the Museum). The Museum is located in Theodore Roosevelt Park, which is City-owned parkland under the jurisdiction of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks). The Gilder Center would be an approximately 203,000-gross-square-foot (gsf) addition on the west side of the Museum complex facing Columbus Avenue. The proposed project would also include approximately 42,000 gsf of renovations to existing Museum space and improvements to an approximately 75,000 sf adjacent public open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park.

This chapter discusses the defining characteristics of the neighborhood surrounding the project site, including the streets within the neighborhood, and assesses the proposed project's potential to result in adverse impacts to the neighborhood character.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

As detailed below, the proposed project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood. The Museum, notable open space resources, and well-trafficked streets and sidewalks are well established defining features of the character of the neighborhood. With the exception of historic resources and transportation, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts that could impact neighborhood character. The impacts in those two areas would not be of a scale or character as to adversely impact neighborhood character. In addition, the proposed project would not result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. Overall, the proposed project would be consistent with the existing character of the neighborhood and would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

B. METHODOLOGY

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an analysis of neighborhood character begins by determining whether a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any relevant technical area (land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) or if a project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. If the answer is yes, a preliminary assessment is undertaken; the preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood that comprises the study area, followed by an assessment of the potential for the proposed project to affect the defining features of the neighborhood, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas. If the preliminary assessment concludes that the proposed project has the potential to affect defining features of the neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character may be warranted. If needed, the detailed assessment would use the information from the preliminary assessment as a baseline and then project and compare the future No Action and With Action conditions.

Since the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) includes analyses of several environmental impact categories that are relevant to neighborhood character (i.e., land use, open space, shadows, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, transportation, and noise), a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character has been prepared. The preliminary assessment describes the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses the potential for the proposed project to impact these defining features. Typically, no one feature would be considered dominant in defining the character of any neighborhood. Rather, the various localized neighborhood components contribute to an amalgam of elements that make up the overall neighborhood character of the study area.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

As stated in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for a preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood. The study area for this analysis is consistent with Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” and encompasses the area bounded by West 86th Street to the north, West 72nd Street to the south, the Loop Drive of Central Park to the east, and Broadway to the west. Since this study area includes the basic features that constitute the character of the neighborhood, it reflects the area in which the proposed project could reasonably be expected to generate significant adverse impacts related to neighborhood character. The portion of the Upper West Side within the study area is a predominantly residential neighborhood, including a diverse range of families, elderly people, and young adults, with commercial corridors located along Broadway, Amsterdam Avenue, Columbus Avenue, and West 72nd Street. In addition to this predominantly residential neighborhood with commercial corridors, the character of the study area is primarily defined by the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, the Museum, other community facilities, Theodore Roosevelt Park and Central Park, and well-trafficked streets and sidewalks.

Residential uses in this area include row houses that are generally located on side streets, and larger apartment buildings that are generally located on the Avenues or Central Park West, and

also on the block of West 79th Street that leads to the project site. Commercial uses are concentrated on Broadway, the Avenues, and West 72nd Street, and are typically located at the ground floor of mixed-use buildings with residential apartments above. Many of these residential uses vary in architectural styles. Since the study area includes a portion of the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, which is roughly bounded by West 62nd Street on the south, Amsterdam Avenue on the west, West 96th Street on the north, and Central Park West on the east, there are many architectural resources within the study area. Therefore, the architectural resources associated with the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District contribute to the neighborhood character. The study area also includes several community facility uses to help serve and support the needs of the surrounding residents and neighborhood, as well as major institutional uses that attract visitors from the neighborhood and from a larger area. Defining community facility and institutional uses in the study area include schools, libraries, religious facilities, AMNH, the New-York Historical Society, and the Children's Museum.

As one of these institutional uses and a central attraction in the area, the Museum is a defining feature of the character of the neighborhood. The Museum has been a part of the neighborhood for more than a century. In addition to the Museum, the surrounding Theodore Roosevelt Park is one of the many open spaces in the study area that are a defining neighborhood feature that help serve resident's and visitors' recreational needs.

One of the more predominant open spaces within the study area is Central Park. Under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks, Central Park is a world-famous recreational and cultural destination for New York City residents and visitors. Within the study area, Central Park contains numerous playgrounds, fields, esplanades, greenways, gardens, a theater, and waterbodies. Central Park is a defining feature of the neighborhood, offering many recreational opportunities for the neighborhood.

Like many neighborhoods in New York City, a contributing characteristic of the study area is its wide range of travel modes, with foot traffic on most of the area's sidewalks and crosswalks, and a mix of auto/taxi/bus traffic on the streets. Bus transit services are located along numerous study area roads including Columbus Avenue, Amsterdam Avenue, Central Park West, and West 81st Street, and, at certain times, school buses and tour buses park in the vicinity of the Museum. The study area contains a high level of vehicular traffic, particularly on Central Park West, West 81st Street and Columbus Avenue. The study area also contains bicycle lanes on Central Park West, Columbus Avenue, Amsterdam Avenue, West 77th Street, and West 78th Street. The C and B subway trains, as well the No. 1 train, serve the site.

Overall, the defining features of the study area's neighborhood character are residential areas with commercial corridors, the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, the Museum, other community facilities, notable open space resources, and well-trafficked streets and sidewalks.

POTENTIAL TO AFFECT DEFINING FEATURES OF A NEIGHBORHOOD

The following sections discuss potential changes resulting from the proposed project in the remaining technical areas that are considered in a neighborhood character assessment under CEQR:

LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY

The proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to land use, zoning, and public policy, as described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy.” The proposed project would result in improvements to the Museum’s existing cultural, educational, and scientific research uses, and would not introduce any new or incompatible uses to the site. The Museum is a well-established use, as an 1876 State statute set aside the entire site of Manhattan Square (now Theodore Roosevelt Park) for the Museum. Three existing buildings within the Museum complex would be removed to accommodate a portion of the project, thereby minimizing the new building’s footprint on land that is now open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park. Although the proposed project would result in the loss of publicly accessible open space, the proposed project would improve the remaining publicly accessible open space, resulting in an enhancement of the neighborhood character. The improvement of existing land uses within the project site would not result in a significant adverse impact on adjacent land uses in the study area, as the proposed project would not affect land use conditions outside of Theodore Roosevelt Park. Overall, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse neighborhood character impacts related to land use, zoning, and public policy.

OPEN SPACE

As described in Chapter 3, “Open Space,” the project would result in a reduction in available open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park of approximately 0.27 acres (approximately 11,600 sf). While adverse, this loss of open space would not result in a significant impact. The character of the park along Columbus Avenue is anticipated to be similar to the existing paths and landscaped areas, primarily designed for walking and quiet activities. Nearby sections of the Park and other resources in the area would accommodate the largely passive recreation activities displaced from the affected area. In addition to enabling greater accessibility to the Museum, the proposed project would also result in enlargement of the Margaret Mead Green, improvements to the overall quality of the paths and landscaping including approximately 75,000 sf of Theodore Roosevelt Park, and more areas for respite and seating away from Museum entry.

As described in more detail in Chapter 3, the proposed project also includes two enhancements that would result in a net increase in the amount of publicly accessible open space in the park. Specifically, as part of the proposed project, the enlarged, approximately 27,137-square-foot Margaret Mead Green lawn, which is currently fenced and not open to the public, would be made available for managed public access in a manner consistent with and supportive of the current character of Theodore Roosevelt Park. It is anticipated that the lawn would continue to be fenced, access would be available through one or more public gates; plantings and other improvements would be made within the lawn area. The Museum, in consultation with NYC Parks, would develop a proposed operating and maintenance plan for providing and managing public access to the lawn while also protecting the grass and surrounding plantings (e.g., during reseeded, wet conditions, etc.). In addition, a portion of the lawn area adjacent to the Columbus Avenue sidewalk between West 78th Street and West 79th Street would be made available for public access. This approximately 6,400-square foot lawn is located behind the Park boundary fence, between the existing entrance to the Museum’s West 78th Street service driveway and the proposed new entry paths in front of the proposed Gilder Center. The Museum, in consultation with NYC Parks, would develop a proposed operating and maintenance plan, as well as a design for any needed improvements (such as seating), for providing and managing public access within this area while also protecting the grass and surrounding plantings and maintaining security along the Museum’s service driveway. The Museum also would consult with the Park Working

Group as plans and designs for these two areas are developed. These enhancements would respond to the project's loss of open space by ~~increasing the amount~~ making additional existing of publicly accessible open space within Theodore Roosevelt Park publicly available to park users, resulting in a net increase of publicly accessible open space with the proposed project. In addition, the Museum has committed to provide One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) per year for a minimum of 10 years to for the management and maintenance of Theodore Roosevelt Park. Even if the proposed project were determined to have significant adverse open space impacts, the inclusion of these enhancements would effectively comply with the mandate of CEQR for practicable mitigation.

It is currently expected that the proposed project would directly affect seven canopy trees in Theodore Roosevelt Park that would be removed and one understory tree that would be relocated. Construction would be performed in compliance with an approved tree protection plan and NYC Parks tree protection protocols. Any trees that are removed and not transplanted would be replaced, consistent with NYC Parks rules and regulations, which would include six new canopy trees and thirteen new understory trees that would be planted post-construction as part of the landscape plan for the western portion of the Park. With the project's proposed landscaping modifications and improvements, park users would continue to have access to areas for gathering, play, and respite, as well as pathways for Museum entry and traversing the Park. Therefore, the changes to open space resources associated with the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

SHADOWS

As described in Chapter 4, "Shadows," the proposed project would cast new shadows on Theodore Roosevelt Park, but these shadows would fall primarily on portions of the Park that would be re-landscaped and reconfigured as part of the proposed project; therefore, the landscape plan for this area would take project-generated shadows into consideration. New shadow would also fall on portions of the Arthur Ross Terrace in all seasons, but would be limited in extent, and would briefly fall on a very small area of the west façade of the Rose Center for Earth and Space in certain seasons. The proposed project's additional shadows would not significantly alter the usability of Theodore Roosevelt Park or threaten the health of its vegetation during its growing season. Therefore, the changes in shadows resulting from the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

As described in Chapter 5, "Historic and Cultural Resources," the project would result in the removal of three existing buildings. Two of the buildings that would be removed on the site of the proposed Gilder Center are of recent construction and not historically significant (the Weston Pavilion built in 2000 and Building 15A, a 1965 conversion of the original one-story south adjoining Boiler House portion of Building 15, the Museum's original Power House). A third, Building 15, the original Power House, was built in the early 20th century but has subsequently been substantially altered including full interior renovations and recladding and removal of original façades. Since Building 15 was constructed as part of the 1874-1935 development of the Museum (although highly altered subsequently), demolition of this contributing building to the S/NR-listed Museum complex would constitute a significant adverse impact on architectural resources. In addition, connections would be made to ten existing buildings on the Museum's campus.

However, the overall design of the proposed project would complete the Columbus Avenue façade with an entrance and focal point and create an east-west corridor axis in the Museum between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. The contemporary architectural approach for the Gilder Center would reflect the time in which it is built, as do all the primary façade buildings at the Museum, including the Rose Center. Overall, the proposed scale, massing, and materials would respect the historic setting with a design that also expresses the Museum’s scientific and educational mission. As described in Chapter 5, “Historic and Cultural Resources,” LPC issued its Binding Report on November 2, 2016, approving the proposed design of the Gilder Center and modifications to the existing Museum complex and site, subject to LPC’s further review and approval of final Department of Buildings (DOB) filing drawings. In a letter dated April 25, 2017, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) concurred that there are no prudent and feasible alternatives to demolition of Building 15. As described in Chapter 17, “Mitigation,” measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the project’s adverse impacts on architectural resources are set forth in a draft Letter of Resolution (LOR) to be executed among the Museum, OPRHP, and Empire State Development (ESD).

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

The proposed Gilder Center would be compatible with the height, massing, and proportions of the other buildings composing the Museum complex and with buildings in the study area, as described in more detail in Chapter 6, “Urban Design and Visual Resources.” The lighting plan would provide lighting for Museum and Park uses in keeping with the surrounding area and consistent with other sides of the Museum complex. Although the proposed project would occupy a small section of Theodore Roosevelt Park, and require removal of trees as described above, it would also widen the park entrance on Columbus Avenue making it more accessible, reconfigure the path network in front of the Museum, add benches, plant new trees, and include other landscape improvements. All of these improvements would enhance the visual quality and function of this section of the Park. Further, by creating a more visible and accessible entrance to the Museum, the proposed project would improve the experience of Museum and park users in this area of Theodore Roosevelt Park resulting in beneficial effects on the streetscape and on pedestrians and park users. Therefore, the changes to urban design and visual resources associated with the proposed project would not adversely impact neighborhood character.

TRANSPORTATION

With the proposed project, Museum attendance and utilization would increase, and the proposed project would redirect more existing visitors to the Columbus Avenue side of the Museum. While transit and parking demand would increase in the future with the proposed project, the increases would not be significant.

As described in Chapter 9, “Transportation,” the proposed project would result in significant adverse traffic impacts at three intersections during Saturday peak hour and at one intersection during the weekday PM peak hour, and significant adverse pedestrian impacts at one intersection during the Saturday peak hour. As detailed in Chapter 17, “Mitigation,” the significant adverse traffic impacts predicted to occur at during the PM and Saturday peak hours could be fully mitigated with signal retiming. The significant adverse pedestrian impact could be fully mitigated with crosswalk widening. The incremental vehicle and pedestrian trips introduced by the proposed project at these impacted locations would be relatively low and the finding of significant adverse traffic and pedestrian impacts is due in part to existing conditions. As

previously discussed, the neighborhood character of the study area is partly defined by existing well-trafficked streets and sidewalks. Therefore, the increased traffic resulting from the proposed project would not represent a significant change to the existing neighborhood character.

NOISE

The proposed project would not generate sufficient traffic to cause a significant noise impact, and the building would meet all applicable noise regulations to avoid producing levels that would result in any increase in ambient noise levels. While the proposed project would generate interior noise near the relocated service and loading areas, the new location would be shielded from nearby receptors due to its location in the below-grade space of the proposed building. In fact, the relocated loading areas would be farther away from any noise receptors than the existing loading dock and would not have the potential to significantly affect noise levels within the surrounding Theodore Roosevelt Park or nearby residences. Therefore, the changes in noise associated with the proposed project would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

CONSIDERATION OF CUMULATIVE MODERATE EFFECTS

The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that even if a project does not have the potential to result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character in a certain technical area, the project may result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that may cumulatively affect an area's neighborhood character. A moderate effect is defined by the *CEQR Technical Manual* as an effect considered reasonably close to a significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical area. The proposed project's effects related to some of the technical analyses discussed above would not be sufficiently substantial to be considered moderate effects, including: land use, zoning, and public policy; urban design and visual resources; and noise.

As described above, the proposed project would result in a reduction in available open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park of approximately 0.27 acres and generate incremental shadows on Theodore Roosevelt Park, both of which could be considered moderate effects. However, these changes would not adversely impact the defining features of the neighborhood. Project-generated shadows would not significantly alter public use of the park or threaten the viability of trees or other vegetation. Moreover, with the project's proposed landscaping modifications and improvements, park users would continue to have access to areas for gathering, play, and respite, as well as pathways for Museum entry and traversing the Park. With new plantings, benches, and rebuilt paths, the overall quality in the rebuilt portion of the Park would be improved. Along with other study area open spaces, Theodore Roosevelt Park would continue to be a defining neighborhood feature. Therefore, even when considered together, the moderate effects due to open space and shadows would not constitute a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character. In addition, the proposed project includes two enhancements that would result in a net increase in the amount of publicly accessible open space in the park.

D. CONCLUSION

Overall, the proposed project would not substantially alter the character of the neighborhood. While the study area is predominantly residential with commercial corridors, the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, the Museum, other community facilities, notable open space resources, and well-trafficked streets and sidewalks are also well established defining features of the character of the neighborhood.

AMNH Gilder Center

With the exception of historic resources and transportation, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on any of the technical areas that could impact neighborhood character. As noted above, although the proposed project would result in a significant adverse impact on architectural resources, the proposed scale, massing, and materials of the proposed project would respect the historic setting and would therefore not be of a scale or character as to adversely impact neighborhood character. Mitigation measures have been identified for all of the proposed project's significant adverse transportation impacts. These impacts would not be of a scale or character as to adversely impact neighborhood character. As noted above, the thoroughfares and sidewalks in the neighborhood are already well trafficked. The proposed project would not be expected to result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. Overall, the proposed project would be consistent with the existing character of the neighborhood and would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character. *